Shining the Spotlight: Helping Learners Identify Transferable Soft Skills

Steve Schmidt
Adult Education Consultant
schmidtconsulting4@gmail.com

Technical skills get our learners hired, but soft skills keep them employed. Soft skills, the 4 Cs of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, are not always easy to identify in practice. In this interactive workshop, you will learn ways to assist our learners in identifying their soft skills so they can self advocate and build winning resumes. We'll do this through simple-to-implement reflection activities that our students can easily do.

Workshop Goals

At the end of this workshop, I will be able to:

- Describe soft skills

- Explain methods to help learners identify their soft skills

- Access applicable soft skills identification resources

The 4 Cs of Soft Skills:
Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication

# 1: Critical Thinking	**What is it?** Looking carefully at information before making a choice or solving a problem

How we do it:

- Look at information using facts, not feelings or personal opinions
- Respect other people's viewpoints and understand that there are many good ideas
- Solve problems step by step instead of guessing
- Break big ideas or problems into smaller parts to better understand them

# 2: Creativity	**What is it?** Using imagination to come up with new ideas or new ways to do things

How we do it:

- Come up with new or different ideas to solve a problem or meet a need
- See challenges as chances to learn or improve, not just problems
- Share new ideas and try new ways to help

# 3: Collaboration	**What is it?** Working together with others to reach a goal

How we do it:

- Communicate clearly with teammates
- Value the work that others bring to the group
- Give and receive feedback
- Be flexible and compromise when needed
- Take on a role and contribute to the group

# 4: Communication	**What is it?** Sharing thoughts, questions, ideas, and solutions in a clear way

How we do it:

- Share thoughts verbally and non-verbally in different ways (writing, team meetings, oral presentations) making sure the message sent is the one received
- Listen carefully to what is said and not said
- Change messaging depending on the audience
- Use media to strengthen the message (slides, video)

Adapted from National Education Association (2012) and Roberts (2017)

The 4 Cs of Soft Skills: Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication	
# 1: Critical Thinking	**What is it?** Looking carefully at information before making a choice or solving a problem

How Can We Teach It?
- Use graphic organizers to make thinking visible
- Model thought processes using **think-alouds**
- Analyze both sides of an argument
- Give students time and space to solve problems and ask them focusing questions (Why did you decide to _____? How did you _____ ?) instead of solving the problem for them
- Simulate postsecondary education and workplace scenarios in class

# 2: Creativity	**What is it?** Using imagination to come up with new ideas or new ways to do things

How Can We Teach It?
- Brainstorm several solutions before solving problems
- Follow a process approach in writing: pre-write, draft, edit and revise, publish
- Use project-based and problem-based learning to explore issues learners care about
- Solve math problems using multiple methods (draw a picture, create a graph, etc.)

# 3: Collaboration	**What is it?** Working together with others to reach a goal

How Can We Teach It?
- Explain the important role of groups in modern business and how to collaborate for success
- Teach learners how to successfully work in groups
- Give learners different roles in groups (leader, time keeper, recorder) and vary roles each time

# 4: Communication	**What is it?** Sharing thoughts, questions, ideas, and solutions in a clear way

How Can We Teach It?
- Use articles about soft skills during reading and writing skill-building activities
- Do role plays and read case studies that show effective and poor communication skills
- Use technology to find, evaluative, organize, create, and communicate information (web searches, email, learning management systems, generative AI prompts)
- Create presentations using PowerPoint or Google Slides
- Model effective communication skills in class

Adapted from National Education Association (2012) and Roberts (2017)

Soft Skills Reflection

After doing a learning activity, ask students to reflect on how they used soft skills:

1. How did we communicate during this activity (oral, written)?

2. How could we improve communication in the future?

3. How did we collaborate during this activity?

4. How could we improve future collaborations?

5. How did we use critical thinking skills during this activity?

6. What would have helped us think more clearly?

7. How did we show creativity during this activity?

8. What would have helped us be more creative?

Identify Your Transferrable Skills

Skill	Example	How have you have used this skill?
Communication	You used social media and WhatsApp to let your neighbors know the rate you charge to do yard work.	
Communication	When you noticed a fallen stop sign on your street, you called the mayor's office to report it.	
Communication	You listened carefully to the concerns of all family members when you were helping your sick mother.	
Collaboration	When someone at your job came down with the flu, you worked with your co-workers to do their tasks.	
Collaboration	You worked with other parents to get your city to build a better playground in your neighborhood.	
Creativity	When your child started attending school by Zoom, you thought of ways to make it work.	
Creativity	You manage the household schedule for your family that has three busy kids.	
Critical Thinking	When you weren't sure how to use a banking app, you looked it up online and read instructions.	
Critical Thinking	At a meeting, you listened to both sides of an argument before deciding which side you would support.	

Adapted from *The Change Agent*, Issue 55

Applying for Jobs: What, Why, How

1. Find a job opening that interests you

2. Fill out the what, why, how chart

What?	Why?	How?
What qualifications does the job require?	Why am I the right person for this job?	Give evidence that shows how you are the best person for this job
Example **Strong time management skills**	**Over the past five years, I have balanced work and school. I needed to organize my time so I could do my school work well and give my employer my best effort. I would go to the library for an hour after school to do homework and then work until 9 PM.**	**- I finished my Certified Phlebotomy Technician certification while I was working 25 hours per week and raising my daughter** **- When I was in high school, I worked 18 hours per week (the maximum allowed) and still completed my school work on time**

Classroom Jobs

Job	Job Duties	Language for the Job
Greeter	• Welcomes new students to class • Shows new students class routines • Answers questions	• *Welcome to our class!* • *Here is how things work ___* • *What questions do you have?*
Athletic Trainer	• Uses a timer. Leads the class in a stretch break for 1-2 minutes in the middle of class time.	• *Stand up, stretch, reach, look left and right*
Meteorologist News Anchor	• Provides a 1-minute summary of the weather for the day/ week or an important news event.	• *Today the weather is going to be clear, cold, cloudy, windy, etc.* • *I'm going to share some important news with you*
Celebration Coordinator	• Celebrates holidays and students' birthdays.	• *Today we celebrate ___* • *These people have birthdays this month:*
Chat Moderator	• While the teacher is presenting, lets the teacher know if there are questions.	• *Excuse me, teacher (Ms., Mr.) _____ has a question* • *Sorry to interrupt, but there are a few questions*
Historian	• Provides historical information.	• *On this day in history ___ happened*
Motivational Speaker	• Describes a quote/concept explaining why the quote/concept is inspiring.	• *This quote/story is by ____* • *It inspired me because ____*

Magy and Price (2022) from Kary (2021)

Critical Thinking: Employee Social Media Guidelines Activity

McLean Hospital Social Media Policies

The following are guidelines for McLean Hospital employees, students, volunteers, and contractors who participate in social media. Social media includes personal blogs and other websites, including Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube or others. These guidelines apply whether employees and students are posting to their own sites or commenting on other sites.

Follow all applicable McLean Hospital policies. For example, you must not share confidential or proprietary information about McLean Hospital and you must maintain patient privacy. Among the policies most pertinent to this discussion are those concerning patient confidentiality, government affairs, mutual respect, political activity, computer, email and Internet use, photography and video, and release of patient information to media.

Write in the first person. Where your connection to McLean Hospital is apparent, make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of McLean Hospital. In those circumstances, you should include this disclaimer: "The views expressed on this [blog; website] are my own and do not reflect the views of my employer." Consider adding this language in an "About me" section of your blog or social media profile.

If you identify your affiliation to McLean Hospital, your social media activities should be consistent with McLean's high standards of professional conduct. If you communicate on a public website about McLean Hospital or McLean Hospital-related matters, you must disclose your connection with McLean Hospital and your role at McLean. Only approved spokespeople are permitted to speak on behalf of the hospital and no accounts may be set up without authorization.

Be professional, use good judgment, and be accurate and honest in your communications; errors, omissions or unprofessional language or behavior reflect poorly on McLean, and may result in liability for you or McLean Hospital. Be respectful and professional to fellow employees, business partners, competitors, and patients. Ensure that your social media activity does not interfere with your work commitments.

McLean Hospital does not endorse people, products, services, and organizations. Please keep this in mind when posting on social media sites as well.

Your social media name, handle, and URL should not include McLean Hospital's name or logo and you should not use your McLean/Partners business email address in association with personal social media accounts.

Social Media Posts

Read the Employee Social Media Guidelines for McLean Hospital. Decide if the following social media posts meet hospital guidelines. If they do not, rewrite the post in the boxes below.

Post 1

My charge nurse at McLean is a fool. She plays favorites all the time. If you're her friend, life's easy. If not, you get all the grunt work. Today, she gave me five extra patients to see while she herself was responsible for none, even though our floor was packed!! I could see that she gave her pets (Sean, Gloria, Letisha and Chanell) fewer patients too. The witch makes my blood boil. She spends most of her time talking to her pets and trying to make herself look good to her boss. Meanwhile me and the other nurses on the outs do all the work! Her pets do little and get away with murder. McLean should fire her STAT and get someone on the floor who knows how to nurse. I"VE HAD IT WITH THIS INCOMPETENT NURSE AND HOSPITAL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (#FuriousOnFourthFloor)

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Post 2

So happy my all-time favorite patient is leaving McLean today and headed home!!!!! So thankful!!!!!!



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[empty box]
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Post 3

Wow!!!! Look what I got to play with today in nurse's training – a human placenta! #PlacentaPower

Post 4

Hey!!! What's the difference between a gang of incompetent fools and the leadership team at McLean???? None – HA!!! Once again patients suffer as these overpaid ***@%& pad their own pockets while we continue to be understaffed. We heard today that leadership gets a 10% raise while 2 nurses get laid off!!!!!
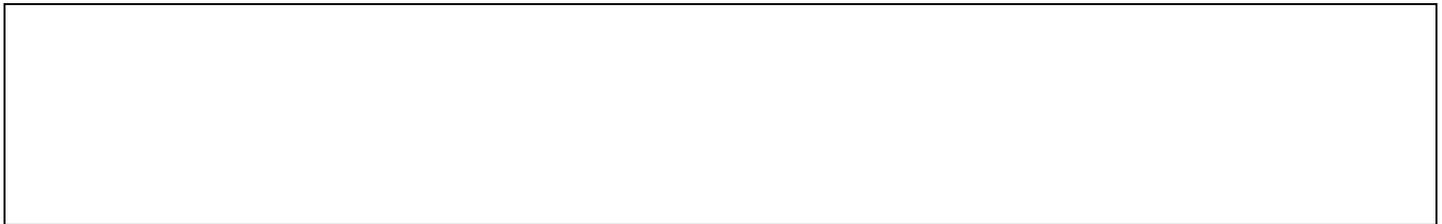
Post 5

Shout out to the McLean doctors on the fourth floor, having to deal with a code has to be hard and if a patient dies. I don't think I could handle that. You guys are the best!!!

(Schmidt, 2017)

Critical Thinking: Case Studies

Math is Important

On Monday, a major retailer put a bottle of red fruit punch on sale using the sign below. At the end of the week, managers noticed that the item did not sell at all. Please discuss:

1. Why didn't the product sell even though it was put on sale?

2. What can management do to make sure this does not happen again in the future?

We Need to Cut Overtime

Due to budget cuts, Harris County needs to lower its employees' overtime costs. The personnel office sent out the following memo to all supervisors about its new overtime policy:

"When workloads increase to a level requiring hours in excess of an employee's regular duty assignment, and when such work is estimated to require a full shift of eight (8) hours or more on two (2) or more consecutive days, even though unscheduled days intervene, an employee's tour of duty shall be altered so as to include the hours when such work must be done, unless an adverse impact would result from such employee's absence from his previously scheduled assignment."

The next day, the personnel office received 73 phone calls and 268 emails about the new policy.

1. Why did the personnel office receive so many phone calls and emails about the new policy?

2. Read this article about ways to reduce overtime. Choose three ways you think are best for employers to use to cut overtime.

3. What does this case study tell us about how important writing is in the workplace?

Creativity: Resolving Conflicts

Steps to Resolve a Conflict

1. **Try** to find the exact cause of the conflict.

2. **Ask** each person to clearly tell his side of the conflict.

3. **Encourage** each person to consider the other person's view.

4. **Ask** each person to describe how she would like the problem solved. Compare their solutions.

5. **Brainstorm** possible ideas that could lead to a compromise.

6. **Choose** the solution that works best for all, especially for your company.

Look at each of the conflicts below from both sides. Using the 6 steps to resolve a conflict, suggest possible ways to compromise.

Conflict 1

Sabeen and Tanya work at desks that are next to each other. Sabeen is very friendly and outgoing. Tanya is quieter and keeps to herself. Sabeen makes many personal calls from her desk. This annoys Tanya, who finds the calls distracting. She reports Sabeen for breaking the rules. Only some of her complaints are true. Tanya is trying to get Sabeen fired.

Conflict 2

James has been with a plumbing company for more than 30 years. He does not have a plumber's license, but he has had many years of experience. Mick just started working at the company. He has his plumber's license. James is upset because others at the company see Mick as the expert on plumbing. But Mick has only been with the company for a few months. James is jealous of Mick and criticizes every idea that he has. Mick feels that James does not respect him, so he does not treat James with respect.

Conflict 3

Carlos and Suzanne are two computer techs in the same hospital. They both hope to be named head of the technology department. Each complains about the other's work all the time. Both are good at their jobs, and the problems they complain about are small. Their fighting has gotten so bad, the other techs have complained to the human resources staff. If Carlos and Suzanne keep complaining, neither will be named head of the department.

Creativity: Problem Solving

Introduce a problem situation orally or by reading a text. Make this real by encouraging students to use problems they actually face. Students can write down and anonymously submit their problems in a "problem box" or email them to their instructor.

Using collaborative groups with a team leader, recorder/reporter, and timekeeper, students meet and discuss possible solutions and consider the consequences of taking those actions. Groups determine the best solution and report their findings to the whole class. A class poll can be taken and tabulated by the teacher to see which is the most agreed upon solution.

Use a problem-solving tool like IDEAL and see the Teaching the Skills That Matter lesson on Unmet Workplace Performance Outcomes.

Helpful language frames:

Ask for an opinion
What do you think she/he should do?

Provide a possible problem solution
I think he/she should _____ because _____ .

Consider the consequences of taking an action
If she/he does _____ , then _____might happen.

Adapted from Magy and Price (2022)

Collaboration: Group Work Debrief

1. What did you learn about yourself as a team member from doing this task?

2. What were our strengths as a team?

3. How can we improve as a team?

4. What did we learn about teamwork through doing this task?

Adapted from Roberts (2017)

Communication: Writing Effective Emails

1. **Identify the purpose of the email**: It is very important for you to identify the purpose of the email prior to writing it and then to make that purpose clear in the subject and beginning of your email.

2. **Use the subject line wisely**: Take the time to select a meaningful, straightforward subject line that succinctly identifies the reason for the email.

3. **Make sure you are identifiable**: Take the time to make sure that your full name is placed as the sender so that the receiver will know who you are. Avoid using initials or nicknames as many people tend to ignore emails that are not sent with whole names they recognize.

4. **Get to the point**: Make sure your emails are concise. People want to know what the email is about as soon as they open it. After a brief greeting followed by a comma, make sure the next few lines are related specifically to the subject of the email. If this is a reply to another email, reply immediately to any questions posed in the original email. Short sentences and paragraphs are better than long ones. Use an active voice such as "We are sending your order today" instead of "Your order will be sent by us today."

5. **Make sure your email is readable**: Whether it's because of poor grammar or spelling, or the use of inappropriate fonts and abbreviations, or even worse, an email written in bright colors or all capital letters, it is always best to use the proper format when sending an email. Proofread your email before sending it, and keep the formatting simple. Put a blank line between paragraphs.

(Adapted from grammar.yourdictionary.com)

Fix My Email!

From: hunkaburninlove@hotmail.com
To: edwards@sigfiginc
CC: everyonethere@sigfiginc
Subject: Hey Boss Man!

Hey Boss Man!

Jes wanted to let you know that you couldn't have given this new job to no one better than I! I'm really amped up to be workin with ya. and promiset hat I won't let you down. Hey there to all my new peeps at Sig Fig Incor. Wazzup? Looking forward tio getting to no you, dudes.

We'll see you on Monday. I Be there early to get to bwork.

Tjhanks,

Ima New Employee

Using the information from five tips for writing an effective email, re-write this email in a more professional style:

Teaching Resources

Teaching the Skills that Matter in Adult Education (TSTM)

"Teaching the Skills That Matter in Adult Education project (TSTM) trains teachers to integrate the skills that matter to adult students using approaches that work across critical topics. Using the project's tools and training, adult education teachers can teach the transferable skills students need in these critical contexts" (LINCS Federal Initiatives, 2022).

9 Skills that Matter	5 Topic Areas	3 Approaches that Work
Adaptability and Willingness to Learn	Civics Education	Integrated and Contextualized Learning
Communication	Digital Literacy	Problem-based Learning
Critical Thinking	Financial Literacy	Project-based Learning
Interpersonal Skills	Health Literacy	
Navigating Systems	Workforce Preparation	
Problem Solving		
Processing and Analyzing Information		
Respecting Differences and Diversity		
Self-awareness		

The Change Agent

The Change Agent is an online magazine written by adult learners for adult learners. Its goal is to inspire "adult educators and learners to make civic participation part of their teaching and learning."

There are several free career awareness resources available including:

- Free lesson packets on topics such as career exploration, workplace safety, and taking action at work

- Family skills are work skills and things I have done